

More than 500 deaths in 58 days

Wake up to the calamity

MORE than 500 people were killed in the last 58 days according to a newspaper report and 17 on Saturday alone as road accidents continue to be a grave risk to public safety, as shown by the findings of the Bangladesh Health Injury Survey (BHIS)-2016 report released earlier in February. The BHIS-2016 report, carried out by the Centre for Injury Prevention and Research, Bangladesh (CIPRB), revealed that road accidents, on average, kill 64 people in the country every day.

That is an astoundingly high number. And even more astounding when added up to find the number of deaths from road accidents for the whole year — 23,166. In fact, according to World Bank data, Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of death from road accidents in the world. With all this data available and given the severity of what they imply, one would expect the authorities to take the matter seriously.

Unfortunately, that is far from what seems to be the case. Despite the recent announcements by the authorities of launching drives against unfit vehicles and drivers without licences, there is no noticeable improvements as these drives, similar to all previous ones, seem to have withered out even before they began. Illustrating clearly the main reason why Bangladesh has failed to tackle this menace for years now — apathy on part of the authorities.

Thus, only a change in attitude can bring about any significant changes to the horrific condition of road safety in the country. We hope such changes come sooner rather than later, so that no more innocent lives need to be lost before that.

Churches bombed in Egypt

We deplore the attacks

WE denounce in the strongest possible terms the twin blasts that killed 44 people in two Coptic churches in Egypt. The death toll might climb as new casualties are coming up from among those severely wounded in the explosions. This is not the first time that Egypt has been the target of a militant attack: 27 people were killed only last December in an explosion near Saint Mark's Cathedral complex, which is at the heart of the Egyptian capital and the seat of the Coptic Orthodox Pope.

It is evident that the Egyptian authorities, especially their intelligence apparatus, have had little clue as to the planning and execution of such macabre act of terror, which is claimed by the so-called Islamic State (IS). Given the number of terrorist attacks the country has witnessed in the last couple of years, this failure is no less than shocking. The apparently lax security arrangements in the churches at the Palm Sunday, one of the sacred days in Coptic calendar, is equally disquieting.

Since the fall of Hosni Mubarak's dictatorial regime six years ago in a mass upheaval, the country has gone through political instability in some form or the other. The war in Syria and the turmoil in the Middle East have had its spill-over effect on Egypt.

With their safe havens in Iraq and Syria threatened, the terrorists are now trying to gain a foothold in Egypt and other countries where governance is weak and the people in power suffer a legitimacy crisis. It is now apparent that the IS would like to build a strong hideout elsewhere. In this view, we need to gear up our intelligence and reinforce the border so as to make sure the terrorists cannot filter into our territories.

MUHAMMAD AZIZUL HAQUE

DURING our Liberation War, India extended all possible help to us, including providing shelter to more than ten million of our people, mobilising world opinion in our favour, and fighting the Pakistani occupation forces shoulder to shoulder with our freedom fighters towards the end of the war until we achieved victory on December 16, 1971. Bangladeshis remember with gratitude the great role India played and the sacrifices it made to facilitate and expedite the birth of Bangladesh. And no government in Bangladesh has recognised India's role in our Liberation War more fully than the

dominated economy of Bangladesh and a lifeline for tens of millions of its people. Inadequate flow or drying-up of many of these rivers (now considered living and legal entities with their right to live) and their distributaries have already had devastating effects on the lives of aquatic creatures and plants in Bangladesh and consequently to the ecology of the country, thereby engendering climate change and desertification in a country that was once renowned for the superfluity of its water and fertility of its land.

Unfortunately for Bangladesh, the anticipated Teesta water sharing deal did not materialise despite indications from the Indian premier that there would be

Bhutan, which are located in close geographical proximity of Bangladesh across a small stretch of Indian territory, are yet to be effectively connected with Bangladesh for lack of a leading role of India in this regard.

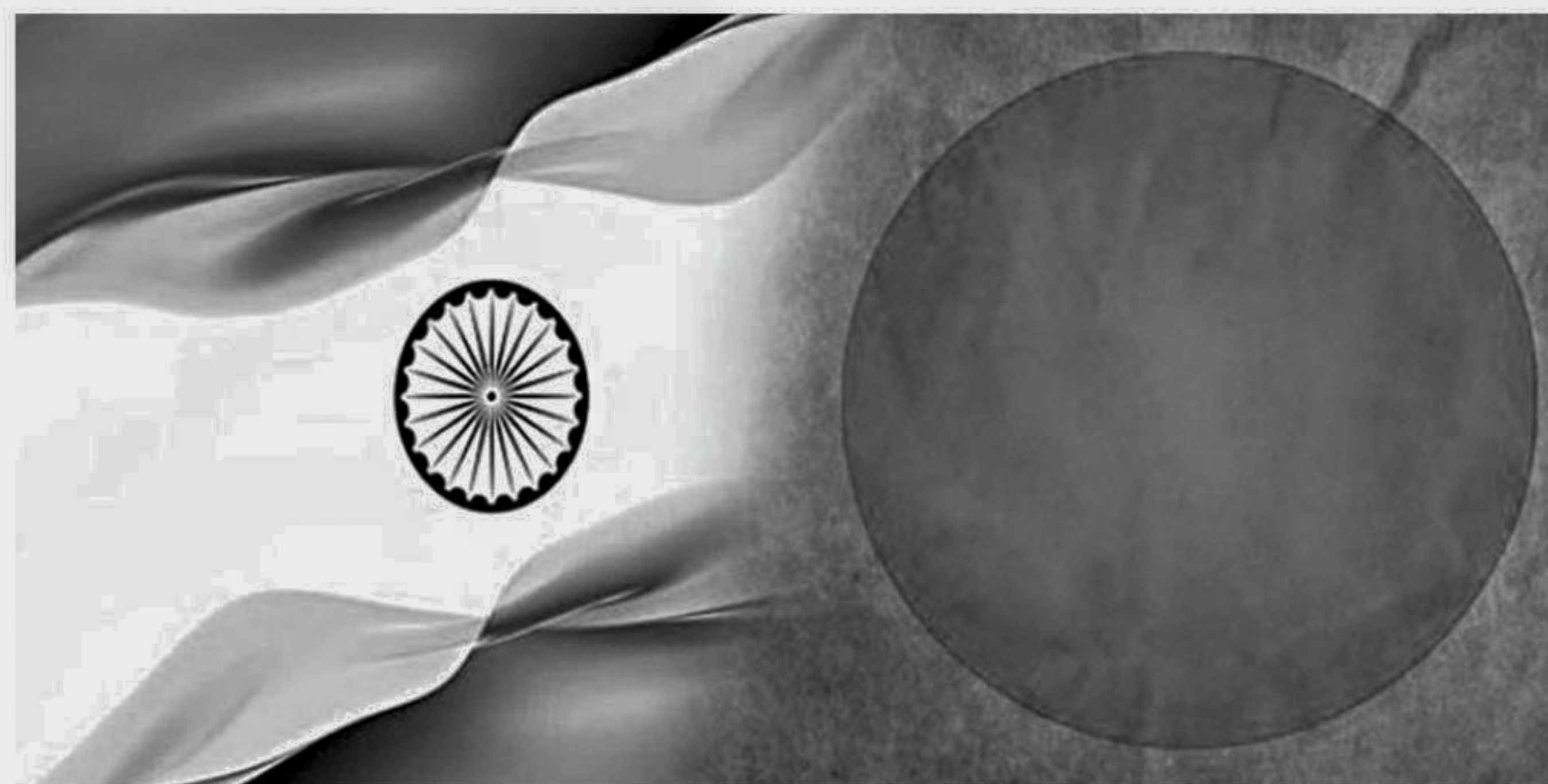
Defence pacts or deals are struck between countries against an actual or perceived enemy. Bangladesh, fortunately, does not have any such adversary. So, she does not really need to sign any defence agreement with any country, China and India included. However, the defence deal that was inked between the two countries in New Delhi on April 8, 2017 seems to be basically a deal under which Bangladesh would make defence procurement from India

affinity with China. So, it is easy for India to forge an unshakeable relationship with Bangladesh based on mutual respect and trust, goodwill and good neighbourliness, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, and respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity. After the eventual implementation of the Indira-Mujib LBA of 1974 in 2015 — thanks to the sincere efforts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi — and the delimitation of the maritime boundary between the two immediate neighbouring countries, there aren't now many major issues between Bangladesh and India. If India ensures the due share of water of the common rivers for Bangladesh, if the border killings are stopped, if there are appropriate quid pro quos from India's side for all that Bangladesh has done so far or will do for it in future, and if India proves to be a good and sincere development partner of Bangladesh while not exhibiting any hegemonic propensities, Bangladesh will spontaneously continue to remain a true and trusted friend and neighbour of India.

Since his assumption of office as the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi has been evincing a keen interest in significantly boosting his country's relations with its South Asian neighbours against the backdrop of China's endeavours to build strategic ties with those countries, including Bangladesh. This is indeed what India's neighbours, especially small ones, expect from it.

India should build better relations with the people of Bangladesh and prove through actions that it cares about their sensitivities, concerns and worries; as Bangladesh, under the current administration, has already cared about theirs. India must ensure that Bangladesh obtains its due and rightful share of the water of the common rivers that flow into Bangladesh from India. These are international rivers, and so nobody has the right to withhold or divert their flows, thereby wreaking havoc on the livelihoods of tens of millions in Bangladesh and the ecology of the country. India ought to conquer the hearts of the people of Bangladesh as that will create an invisible neighbourly bond incomparably stronger and harder to crack than any pact or deal on paper.

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.



SOURCE: PINTEREST

government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Her administration has addressed all the security and other concerns that India had vis-à-vis Bangladesh, and practically met all their expectations from us, including transit and connectivity through the Bangladesh territory. Moreover, we have ensured that the Bangladesh territory is not used to launch terrorist or secessionist attacks in its seven north eastern states. All of this was done to the satisfaction of India.

Sharing of water of the 54 common rivers that flow into Bangladesh from upper riparian India is a crucial issue for Bangladesh, for the water of these rivers is the lifeblood of the still agro-

some resolution to this long standing issue.

As the largest country and economy in South Asia, India is expected to exhibit restraint and generosity in its relationship, particularly with its small neighbours. It should pursue an agenda of collective interest and mutual benefit with its neighbours — not one of self-interest at the expense of its neighbours. Bangladesh, under the present government, has been earnestly striving to do her bit for the development of unimpeded connectivity in our region and beyond — so as to stimulate socioeconomic, cultural and other development in all these countries. Nevertheless, to this day, even Nepal and

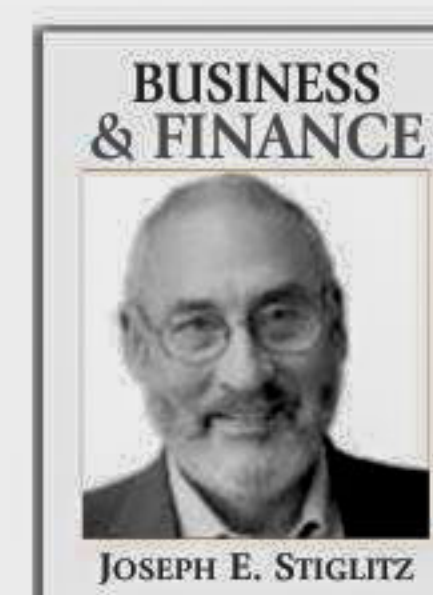
utilising USD 500 million credit line set up by the latter for the purpose.

Bangladesh is a friend of India. Hence any defence pact with India is deemed largely redundant. Bangladesh, which is a NAM (Non-Aligned Movement) member, doesn't need to be sucked into the rivalries of big powers. The government of Sheikh Hasina has done well so far in maintaining a strategic balance in our relations with all the major powers in Asia and beyond.

Bangladesh has a natural affinity with India due to the two countries' shared history and culture, geographical proximity, common ethnic and linguistic similarities, etc. We do not enjoy such

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Illiberal stagnation



BUSINESS & FINANCE

JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ

TODAY, a quarter-century after the Cold War's end, the West and Russia are again at odds. This time, though, at least on one side, the dispute is more transparently about geopolitical power, not ideology. The West has supported in a variety of ways democratic movements in the post-Soviet region, hardly hiding its enthusiasm for the various "colour" revolutions that have replaced long-standing dictators with more responsive leaders — though not all have turned out to be the committed democrats they pretended to be.

Too many countries of the former Soviet bloc remain under the control of authoritarian leaders, including some, like Russian President Vladimir Putin, who have learned how to maintain a more convincing façade of elections than their communist predecessors. They sell their system of "illiberal democracy" on the basis of pragmatism, not some universal theory of history. These leaders claim that they are simply more effective at getting things done.

That is certainly true when it comes to stirring nationalist sentiment and stifling dissent. They have been less effective, however, in nurturing long-term economic growth. Once one of the world's two superpowers, Russia's GDP is now about 40 percent of Germany's and just over 50 percent of France's. Life expectancy at birth ranks 153rd in the world, just behind Honduras and Kazakhstan.

In terms of per capita income, Russia now ranks 73rd (in terms of purchasing power parity) — well below the Soviet Union's former satellites in Central and Eastern Europe. The country has de-industrialised: the vast majority of its exports now come from natural resources. It has not evolved into a "normal" market economy, but rather into a peculiar form of crony-state capitalism.

Yes, Russia still punches above its weight in some areas, like nuclear weapons. And it retains veto power at the United Nations. As the recent hacking of the Democratic Party in the United States shows, it has cyber capacities that enable

it to be enormously meddlesome in Western elections.

There is every reason to believe that such intrusions will continue. Given US President Donald Trump's deep ties with unsavoury Russian characters (themselves closely linked to Putin), Americans are deeply concerned about potential Russian influences in the US — matters that may be clarified by ongoing investigations.

Many had much higher hopes for Russia, and the former Soviet Union more broadly, when the Iron Curtain fell. After seven decades of Communism, the transition to a democratic market economy would not be easy. But, given

placed on privatisation, no matter how it was done, with speed taking precedence over everything else, including creating the institutional infrastructure needed to make a market economy work.

Fifteen years ago, when I wrote *Globalization and its Discontents*, I argued that this "shock therapy" approach to economic reform was a dismal failure. But defenders of that doctrine cautioned patience: one could make such judgments only with a longer-run perspective.

Today, more than a quarter-century since the onset of transition, those earlier results have been confirmed, and those who argued that private property rights,

these beliefs.

I believe the explanation was less sinister: flawed ideas, even with the best of intentions, can have serious consequences. And the opportunities for self-interested greed offered by Russia were simply too great for some to resist. Clearly, democratisation in Russia required efforts aimed at ensuring shared prosperity, not policies that led to the creation of an oligarchy.

The West's failures then should not undermine its resolve now to work to create democratic states respecting human rights and international law. The US is struggling to prevent the Trump



ILLUSTRATION: GIZMODO

the obvious advantages of democratic market capitalism to the system that had just fallen apart, it was assumed that the economy would flourish and citizens would demand a greater voice.

What went wrong? Who, if anyone, is to blame? Could Russia's post-communist transition have been managed better?

We can never answer such questions definitively; history cannot be re-run. But I believe what we are confronting is partly the legacy of the flawed Washington Consensus that shaped Russia's transition. This framework's influences was reflected in the tremendous emphasis reformers

once created, would give rise to broader demands for the rule of law have been proven wrong. Russia and many of the other transition countries are lagging further behind the advanced economies than ever. GDP in some transition countries is below its level at the beginning of the transition.

Many in Russia believe that the US Treasury pushed Washington Consensus policies to weaken their country. The deep corruption of the Harvard University team chosen to "help" Russia in its transition, described in a detailed account published in 2006 by *Institutional Investor*, reinforced

administration's extremism — whether it's a travel ban aimed at Muslims, science-denying environmental policies, or threats to ignore international trade commitments — from being normalised. But other countries' violations of international law, such as Russia's actions in Ukraine, cannot be "normalised" either.

The writer is a Nobel laureate in economics, is University Professor at Columbia University and Chief Economist at the Roosevelt Institute. His most recent book is *The Euro: How a Common Currency Threatens the Future of Europe*. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2017. www.project-syndicate.org

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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We want follow-up news on the Nasirnagar attack

The Nasirnagar attack was a grim incident that revealed the true state of law and order in our country, and completely shattered our spirit.

Bangladesh is no more a poor country, or the "bottomless basket" of Kissinger's criticisms. Our economic performance across different sectors has been lauded by many renowned economists and analysts. But such incidents of human rights violation and repression of minority groups blackens the positive image we have built up in front of the international community. It soils our achievements.

The victims' suffering has not ended — their temples continue to be vandalised, their houses are looted, and the women and girls are under threat of sexual assault by local rogues. But the government still remains silent, and there has been no significant action from the administration.

In this scenario, only the fierce media can bring such atrocities to justice. I am very thankful to the news outlets, especially *The Daily Star*, for their vivid coverage of the Nasirnagar attack. We expect the same from the other media houses of the country. As time passes, however, we must not forget about these incidents. We must provide follow up reports, so that they remain in the public consciousness until such events are stopped once and for all and the miscreants are punished.

Bidit Chowdhury
By email